RESEARCH ARTICLE

PSEUDO-IMPERATIVES: THE SPECIAL CASE OF NATURAL LANGUAGE CONJUNCTION AND DISJUNCTION

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ABSTRACT

Pseudo-imperatives are compound sentences in which an imperative clause is followed by a connective 'and' or 'or' and a declarative clause, but whose meaning differs from standard truth-functional meaning of a conjunction or disjunction. An example of pseudo-imperative is "Ask and it will be given to you". Their meaning is somehow associated with the meaning of natural language indicative conditionals, but there are a lot of difficulties in trying to determine their truth conditions (if they are truth-conditional at all).

Frequent problems in standard approaches to pseudo-imperatives are (1) interpretations that require too much effort to process, (2) different approach to 'and' and 'or' pseudo-imperatives, (3) problems in interpreting pseudo-imperatives whose aim is not to express speaker's positive or negative attitude towards their content, but just to convey information. Moreover, it is not always possible to determine whether a construction is pseudo-imperative or real imperative just with respect to the sentence syntax.

In this paper it is argued that sentence is pseudo-imperative if there is very strong casual relation between constituents. Accordingly, the feature of causal dependence between events is applied to pseudo-imperatives. By accepting this approach, conditional-like meaning of pseudo-imperatives is maintained and there is no difference in interpretation of 'and' and 'or' pseudo-imperatives. Furthermore, this approach is acceptable for any type of pseudo-imperatives, including neutral ones.

Keywords: pseudo-imperatives, connectives, imperatives, conditionals.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this research will be on so-called pseudo-imperatives, constructions which are conjunctions or disjunctions on the syntactic level, but whose meaning is not, at least at first sight, standard truth-functional meaning of a conjunction or disjunction, but rather of an indicative conditional. This paper will offer a draft of answer to the question of how can prototypical connectives in coordinated clauses achieve a conditional-like meaning.

In the first part of this paper, structure, types and properties of pseudo-imperative will be presented and discussed. Afterward, two approaches to pseudo- imperatives, suggested by Billy Clark (firstly published in his PhD thesis from 1991) and Michael Franke (firstly appeared in his MA thesis from 2005), will be briefly described, with an

emphasis on problems that occur in each of them. Finally, a new approach will be offered.

The structure of pseudo-imperatives

Sentence constructions called pseudo-imperatives can be found in various types of texts, including the Bible, but they are also common in everyday speech.

(1) Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Matthew 7:7)

Pseudo-imperatives are compound sentences in which an imperative clause is followed by 'and' or 'or' and a declarative clause. Schematically, according to Franke, pseudo-imperatives are of the form:

an imperative I + 'and' | 'or' + a declarative clause D[1]

They are not real imperatives because they do not express an order or command, but mainly a warning, encouragement or just convey information. What is syntactically an imperative form is not associated with a directive semantically or pragmatically. Thesecond constituent expresses what would happen if the first constituent was satisfied. An intuitive way of comprehending pseudo-imperative as (1) is

(2) If you ask, then it will be given to you (but it is also true that, if you do not ask, it will not be given to you).

We argue that pseudo-imperatives are somehow associated with assertions of natural language indicative conditionals, but there are a lot of difficulties in trying to determine their truth conditions (if they are truth-conditional at all). There is also possibility to treat natural language indicative conditionals as biconditionals, and that can avoid many counterexamples. We argue that, although pseudo-imperatives show biconditional behavior, it is not possible to treat them as biconditionals generally because a number of counterexamples still remain. As a starting point, we assume that pseudo-imperatives *are* some kind of conditional statements we intuitively associate with them.

Let us first explain why pseudo-imperatives cannot be standard conjunctions and disjunctions. If pseudo-imperatives were conjunctions, then it

would be possible to make elimination of the conjunction, because it should be possible for each conjunct to be a separated sentence. It seems possible on the syntactic level, but it is not possible on the semantic level without the change of meaning:

(3) Come to me and I'll make your favorite cake.

It does not follow from (3): Come to me.

It does not follow from (3): I'll make your favorite cake.

The sentence (3) says that the speaker is going to make the hearer's favorite cake in the case that she would come to her, not otherwise.

In the following chapter the standard categorization of pseudo-imperatives suggested by Clark will be presented.

Types of pseudo-imperatives

There are four types of pseudo-imperatives according to their connective and speaker's attitude towards their content (Clark, *Relevance and 'pseudo imperatives'* 79).

1) Sentences with 'and'

a. Positive: Come closer and I'll give you a candy.

In a. the speaker wants the hearer to come closer to her. She obviously thinks that it is not enough just to tell her to come closer, so she adds 'I'll give you a candy'.

b. Negative: Stand up, and I'm going to break your arm.

In b. the speaker probably does not want the hearer to stand up and she add what would happen if the hearer stood up.

c. Neutral: Look at the sky tonight and you'll see the rare lunar eclipse.

In c. the speaker does not mind whether the hearer is going to look at the sky or not, she just says what would happen if the hearer looked at the sky tonight.

2) Sentences with 'or'

Sentences with 'or' can be only positive (and maybe neutral), but there are no negative sentences with 'or'.[2]

a. Positive: Remove your mobile phone or I will take it from you.

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[1](Franke, Pseudo-imperatives 1),

[2] For details, see (Franke, *Pseudo-imperatives and other cases* 2).

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The speaker wants the hearer to remove her mobile phone, but she considers that it is not enough just to tell the hearer to do that, therefore she adds what would happen if the hearer were not remove it.

An open question here is why there are no negative 'or' pseudo-imperatives. According to Franke (Franke, *Pseudo-imperatives* 9), this characteristics of 'or' pseudo-imperatives shows that 'and' and 'or' pseudo-imperatives are different structures that possibly cannot be interpreted on the same way, but we will leave that question open for now. Another question that naturally arises is why we use pseudo-imperatives if we are able to express the same content using a conditional. There are at least two possible reasons:

1) When using pseudo-imperative, which has an imperative as the first constituent, we have higher *illocutionary force* than in declarative sentences 'if,…then'. For that reason pseudo-imperatives are very useful if we want to emphasize something (what is going to happen if you do / if you do not do something).

2) In connection with 1), it is easier to understand and process an 'and' sentence than 'if,…then' sentence, because it is generally easier to process coordinated than subordinated sentences (maybe it is connected with the evolution of syntax, because presumably the emergence of coordinated clauses preceded the emergence of subordinated clauses).

In the following chapters two dominant approaches to pseudo-imperatives will be presented.

Clark's approach

Clark applies the concept of meaning of imperative sentences proposed by the Relevance Theory account[3] and maintains that the sentence connectives in pseudo-imperatives are just truth-functional conjunction and disjunction. This leads him to predict that an utterance like (4a) actually means (4b).

(4) a. Come closer and I'll give you five pounds.
b. It is potential and desirable for you to come closer and (if you do) I will give you five pounds.

The bracketed context-restriction in (4b) is said to be the result of a pragmatic enrichment process, which is an integral part of the interpretation of any utterance.[4]

Clark's interpretation seems unnecessarily complicated. If pseudo-imperative requires such an effort for processing and comprehending, and there are more economic ways to express the same content, then why we use it?

Furthermore, interpretation suggested by Clark might be problematic when it is not desirable (and/or potential) for the hearer to do something that is expressed by the first constituent or the speaker does not care whether it is desirable or potential or not.

(5) a. Open the Guardian and you'll see three misprints on every page.

When neutral imperative as (5) is concerned, Clark claims that an imperative is used in (5) to attribute a potential thought that opening the Guardian is potential and desirable. The interpretation of I-clause can be the following:

b. You might (at some time) think that it is potential and desirable that you open the Guardian.

Why is it potential and desirable for the hearer to open Guardian? It rather seems that the speaker wants to convey the information or her attitude concerning quality of newspaper articles. It is possible that hearer does not even have an opportunity to open the Guardian, but (5) is still acceptable utterance.

To conclude, although Clark's interpretation of pseudo-imperatives as speech- acts conjunctions and disjunctions probably is not wrong, it rather looks unintuitive and it is not entirely applicable to neutral pseudo-imperatives.

Franke's approach

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[3] According to Relevance Theory, the utterance of an imperative with propositional content p such as (a) communicates that the speaker finds it potential and desirable that p.
(a) Close the window!
For details, see for example Wilson, Deirdre and Dan Sperber. "Mood and the analysis of non-declarative sentences." Human agency: Language, duty and value. Ed. Jonathan Dancy, J. Moravcsik, and C.

Taylor. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. 77-101. Print.
[4] (Franke, *Pseudo-imperatives* 8)

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Franke argues that 'and' pseudo-imperatives are assertions of conditionals and 'or' pseudo-imperatives are speech act conjunctions. He explains such a division by claiming that the assertive force associated with 'or' pseudo-imperatives is weaker that the assertive force associated with 'and' ones. Accordingly, it can also be said that assertive in the case of negative 'or' pseudo-imperatives would be the weakest, so this kind of utterance would be the least convincing and least compelling for the hearer. That is the reason why there are no negative 'or' pseudo-imperatives. He claims that positive 'or' pseudo-imperatives are commands or threats:

(6) Close the window or I will kill you.

Utterance (7) contains a directive to close the window and an assertion that non- compliance will be accordingly punished, therefore pseudo-imperatives 'P or Q' have to be understood as a speech act conjunction:

Directive (P) & Assertion ($\neg P \to Q$)[5]

It is not claimed that it is necessary to treat 'or' pseudo-imperatives differently than 'and' ones. Franke's claim that assertive force associated with 'or' pseudo-imperatives is weaker than one associated with 'and' pseudo-imperatives may be true, but still it does not imply that different approach is required..

A proposal for a new solution

As it has been mentioned already, we presuppose for pseudo-imperatives to have conditional reading. Let us firstly take into account the connective 'and'. First of all, although we have a conjunction on the surface, neither the first conjunct, nor the second conjunct are asserted. What is asserted is a general (bi)conditional relation, namely that the second conjunct is the result of the first and therefore holds in all situations where the first conjunct holds, and/or vice versa. From that observation follows an interesting question: How can one of prototypical connectives in coordinated clauses achieve a conditional-like, a subordinate-clause-like, meaning?

Maybe one possible explanation is following: when people understand indicative conditional, they do not think about false possibilities, even they commonly do not consider all

true possibilities, because multiple possibilities tend to exceed working-memory capacity. People usually mentally represent the conditional by thinking about just a single true possibility, in which antecedent and consequent are both true. (Johnson-Laird and Byrne 657) Of course, this is valid just for 'and' pseudo-imperatives, but we may take it into account.

If we consider that the meaning of 'and' in natural language is the same as the meaning of '&' in logic, and every other aspect of its meaning is left to pragmatics, then it is not clear what is entailed by the semantics of 'and' because when occurring in pseudo-imperative, 'and' surely doesn't satisfy standard truth-values of '&'.

One possibility is that, if we claim that a sentence with form: constituent_1 $_{imperative}$ & constituent_2$_{declarative\ future}$ is always pseudo-imperative, we may argue that pseudo-imperatives can be distinguished from all other types of sentences because of their specific syntactic structure. However, it may be problematic for languages like Croatian, where the distribution of connectives is not the same as in English. Except 'and' ('i') and 'but' ('ali'), Croatian also has connective 'a', whose meaning is in English expressed by 'and', 'whereas' or 'but', depending on the particular context. It stands for a weak contrast, since it is commonly employed to convey opposite relations and is only atemporally used.

Consider the following example from Croatian language:

(7) a. Pomozi mi napraviti kolač i skuhat ću nam kavu.

(Help me make a cake and I will make us coffee.)

Sentence (8a) has conditional meaning: if you help me make a cake, I will make us coffee; the first conjunct precedes the second.

b. Pomozi mi napraviti kolač, a ja ću nam skuhati kavu.

(Help me make a cake and [meanwhile; while you are making the cake] I will make us coffee.)

Connective in (8b) has standard truth-functional meaning of conjunction: acts expressed by conjuncts are not connected as in (8a) the first conjunct in (8b) is real imperative and both of the acts expressed may happen simultaneously.

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[5] (Franke, *Pseudo-imperatives* 23)

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The example (8) shows that there is no precise mechanism on the syntactic level that can determine that there is a conjunction in sentence (8b), and conditional in sentence (8a). We might say that, in Croatian, whenever we have I +'a' + D it is a real imperative, and when we have I + 'i' + D, then it is a pseudo-imperative, but we cannot confirm the efficiency of that formula in every single usage. In fact, it looks like the content of every single utterance has the largest impact on being pseudo-imperative or real imperative. We can also find some ambiguous cases in English. We can also find some ambiguous cases in English:

(8) You do the washing-up and I'll dry.

To conclude, a pseudo imperative sounds strange whenever the causal relation between A and B is perceived as 'weak', and/or their illocutionary force is weak. Observation about very strong casual relation between constituents in pseudo- imperative brings us to the counterfactual theory of causation, which can be used in order to explain meaning of pseudo-imperatives.

The counterfactual theory of causation applied to pseudo-imperatives

The basic idea of the counterfactual theory of causation, proposed by David Lewis, is that the meaning of causal claims can be explained in terms of counterfactual conditionals of the form

If *A* had not occurred, *C* would not have occurred $(A\square\rightarrow C)$[6].

Let a world in which the proposition *A* is true is called "*A*-world". Then the counterfactual "*A* $\square\rightarrow$ *C*" is true if and only if *C* is true at the closest *A*-world to the actual world. If, following Lewis, we want to allow that there may not be a single *A*-world, or even any set of *A*-worlds, closest to the actual world, the truth condition is more appropriately given in the following form:

"*A* $\square\rightarrow$ *C*" is true if and only if some (*A&C*)-world is more similar to the actual world than any (*A&¬C*)-world is.[7]

In terms of counterfactuals, Lewis defines a notion of causal dependence between events, which plays a central role in his theory of causation:

Where *A* and *C* are two distinct possible events, *Causally depends* on *A* if and only if, if *A* were to occur *C* would occur $(A\square\rightarrow C)$ and if *A* were not to occur *C* would not occur$(¬A\square\rightarrow ¬C)$.[8]

If we apply feature of causal dependence to pseudo-imperatives, $A_{I\text{-}clause}$ & $B_{D\text{-}clause}$ (if and only if *A* & *B* is a pseudo-imperative) can be interpreted as follows:

$(A\square\rightarrow B)$ &$(¬A\square\rightarrow ¬B)$.[9]

Reconsider the example (4):

(4) Mow the lawn and I will give you five pounds.

Sentence (4) means something like:

(In the *A*-closest worlds) if you mowed the lawn, I would give you five pounds and if you did not mow the lawn, I would not give you five pounds.

It remains to see how to treat 'or' pseudo-imperatives. Firstly, it shall be seen that 'or' pseudo imperatives have almost the same meaning as negative 'and' pseudo-imperatives, just causal dependence in 'or' pseudo-imperatives seems to be weaker than in 'and' ones. However, we can treat both of them in the same way. Therefore, we suggest the following interpretation of 'or' pseudo imperatives:

$(¬A\square\rightarrow B)$ & $(A\square\rightarrow ¬B)$.

Given interpretation can represent the meaning of 'or' pseudo-imperatives that is presupposed by speaker, therefore:

(9) Remove your mobile phone or I will take it

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[6]Counterfactual conditional differs from both material conditional and strict conditional. The material conditional's truth conditions are too weak; not every conditional with a false antecedent is true. But on the other hand, the strict conditional is too strong; the shattering of the glass is not logically entailed, or metaphysically necessitated, by the striking of the glass. (Collins et al 21)

[7] (Lewis 560)

[8] (Lewis 564)

[9] One may ask how it is possible to use counterfactuals when dealing with pseudo-imperatives, whose meaning is similar to indicative conditionals, and not to counterfactuals, but counterfactuals can be used in analysis of causal relations between antecedent and consequent, as well as to talk about possible worlds.

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from you.

Sentence (10) can be understood as: If you did not remove your mobile phone, I would take it from you and if you removed it, I would not.

Conclusion

In this paper we briefly presented standard views on pseudo-imperatives, and then tried to suggest an interpretation presupposing strong causal dependence between constituents, which is the crucial request utterance has to satisfy for being pseudo- imperative.

By accepting this approach, conditional-like meaning of pseudo-imperatives is maintained and there is no difference in interpretation of 'and' and 'or' pseudo- imperatives. Furthermore, this approach is acceptable for any type of pseudo-imperatives, including neutral ones.

We have shown that in some cases minimal semantics of connectives 'and' and 'or' cannot be maintained because semantics of 'and' and 'or' occurring in pseudo-imperatives seems richer than semantics of logical '&' and '∨' (therefore, relevance theoretic request for minimal semantics of connectives probably cannot be satisfied.

This is just the beginning of the research. Still there are examples of pseudo-imperatives that are not appropriately interpreted this way. All of these cases require special treatment and further elaboration.

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